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CIA OPERATIONS CENTER

NEWS ANALYSIS SERVICE

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RNR 300  
WATERGATE

BY ROBERT KEARNS

WASHINGTON, NOV 15, REUTER - DEFENSE LAWYERS AT THE WATERGATE COVER-UP TRIAL TODAY STARTED TO PROBE THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY'S LONG DISPUTED ROLE IN THE SCANDAL. LAWYERS FOR FORMER NIXON CHIEF OF STAFF H.R. HALDEMAN AND DOMESTIC AFFAIRS ADVISER JOHN EHRLICHMAN ASKED JUDGE JOHN SIRICA TO PERMIT A LINE OF DEFENSE SHOWING THE CIA WAS USED TO STOP THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION PROBE INTO WATERGATE TO PREVENT THE DETECTION OF AN EMBARRASSING CIA-RUN BANKING OPERATION IN MEXICO.

THE TWO NIXON ADVISERS ARE CHARGED WITH INTERFERING IN THE INVESTIGATION TO PREVENT THE FBI FROM FINDING OUT THE WHITE HOUSE WAS INVOLVED IN THE JUNE 17, 1972, BREAK-IN AT DEMOCRATIC PARTY HEADQUARTERS IN THE WATERGATE BUILDING.

JUDGE SIRICA INTERRUPTED THE DEBATE OVER THE CIA ROLE TO ORDER A SPEED-UP OF THE INDEPENDENT MEDICAL EXAMINATION OF MR NIXON AS GOVERNMENT PROSECUTORS DISCLOSED THEY PLAN TO CUT SHORT THEIR SIDE OF THE TRIAL AND REST THEIR CASE BY NEXT WEDNESDAY.

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RNR 301

WATERGATE 2 WASHINGTON

"TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE," JUDGE SIRICA SAID AS MR NIXON'S LAWYER, MR HERBERT MILLER, PROMISED TO FLY THIS WEEKEND TO CALIFORNIA TO MEET WITH THE FORMER PRESIDENT, RELEASED FROM HOSPITAL YESTERDAY AFTER AN OPERATION TO PREVENT BLOOD CLOTS FROM REACHING HIS HEART AND LUNGS.

MR EHRLICHMAN'S LAWYERS ARGUE THAT MR NIXON'S TESTIMONY IS CRUCIAL TO HIS DEFENSE AT THE TRIAL.

JUDGE SIRICA SENT THE JURY OUT OF THE ROOM WHEN PROSECUTORS OBJECTED TO ATTEMPTS BY MR HALDEMAN'S LAWYERS TO CROSS-EXAMINE DEPUTY CIA DIRECTOR VERNON WALTERS ON HIS TESTIMONY THAT HE TOLD FBI DIRECTOR PATRICK GRAY TO SLOW DOWN THE WATERGATE INVESTIGATION SIX DAYS AFTER THE BREAK-IN.

MR FRANK STRICKLER, A LAWYER FOR MR HALDEMAN, TOLD THE JUDGE THAT MR HALDEMAN ORDERED MR WALTERS TO GET THE FBI PROBE HALTED OFF BECAUSE IT MIGHT UNCOVER A SECRET CIA MONEY CHANGING OPERATION IN MEXICO CITY.

JOINED BY MR EHRLICHMAN'S LAWYER, MR WILLIAMS FRATES, MR STRICKLER SAID HE WANTED TO SHOW THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS WRONG IN CHARGING THAT THE DEFENDANTS WERE AFRAID THE FBI WOULD TRACE BACK CASH HELD BY THE WATERGATE BURGLARS TO NIXON CAMPAIGN FUNDS, "LAUNDERED" BY THE CIA'S MEXICAN OPERATION.

Comment

REUTER 1401

RNR 313

WATERGATE 3 WASHINGTON (RNR 301.....OPERATION)

MR STRICKLER ARGUED THAT THERE WERE MAJOR CONTRADICTIONS IN TESTIMONY GIVEN ABOUT THE CIA'S ROLE IN WATERGATE BY BOTH MR WALTERS AND THE FORMER DIRECTOR OF THE SPY AGENCY, RICHARD HELMS, NOW AMBASSADOR TO IRAN.

JUDGE SIRICA SAID TODAY HE WOULD CONSIDER CALLING MR HELMS AS A NEUTRAL, COURT WITNESS AT THE TRIAL AFTER BOTH SIDES INDICATED THEY WOULD REFUSE TO VOUCH FOR HIS CREDIBILITY.

MR HELMS WAS ACCUSED BY DEFENSE LAWYERS OF OFFERING DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF THE CIA CONNECTION TO WATERGATE IN CLOSED DOOR TESTIMONY BEFORE CONGRESS AND IN HIS PUBLIC STATEMENTS.

JUDGE SIRICA LISTENED TO THREE SUBPOENAED WHITE HOUSE TAPE RECORDINGS OF MEETINGS BETWEEN THE EX-PRESIDENT AND MR HALDEMAN IN WHICH THEY DISCUSSED USING THE CIA TO THWART THE FBI PROBE.

THE TAPES, ALREADY PLAYED FOR THE JURY, SHOWED MR NIXON APPROVING THE PLAN AND TELLING MR HALDEMAN NOT TO LET THE CIA KNOW OF THE "POLITICAL" PROBLEMS THAT MIGHT RESULT IF THE FBI WERE NOT PUT OFF THE TRACK.

CHIEF PROSECUTOR JAMES NEAL PROTESTED AGAINST DEFENSE ARGUMENTS ABOUT THE CIA AS "ALICE IN WONDERLAND" THEORIES THAT HAVE NEVER BEEN PROVED.

REUTER 1451